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GENERIC PRONOUNS AND PHI-FEATURES: EVIDENCE FROM THAI

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Abstract

In this paper, we investigate the triggers and the distribution of generic pronouns in regard to the theory of pronouns, ϕ -features, reference, and pro-drop. We survey the empirical evidence for different ‘pro-drop types’ focusing on generic pronominal expressions in a set of languages, namely radical pro-drop languages, consistent pro-drop languages, and partial pro-drop languages. In particular we are concerned with the properties that are responsible for the difference between the inclusive, quasi-inclusive, and exclusive generic pronouns, and whether or not the generic reference includes reference to non-humans along with humans. We show that the inclusive pronoun in Thai has unrestricted reference, including humans and (potentially) non-humans. The explanation is that this pronoun has no phi-features. This also explains why it is null: There are no phi-features to spell out. We argue that the quasi-inclusive and exclusive generic pronouns include a silent noun ‘people’.

1. Introduction¹

There are three types of generic pronouns, inclusive, quasi-inclusive, and exclusive, as exemplified in (1a,b,c), respectively.

- (1) a. **One** should always be in love. That’s the reason **one** should never marry.
(Oscar Wilde)
- b. **We** like smoked fish in Finland.
- c. **They** speak lots of different languages in India.

The inclusive pronoun is so called because it refers to people in general including the speaker and the addressee, while the quasi-inclusive pronoun refers to people in general including the speaker but not the addressee, and the exclusive pronoun refers to people in general, in some domain, excluding the speaker and the addressee. There is cross-linguistic variation regarding generic pronouns, including when they can be, or must be null (Holmberg 2005, 2010b, Sigurðsson and Egerland 2009, Phimsawat 2011). The purpose of the paper is to contribute to the description and explanation of this variation in terms of a theory of pronouns, ϕ -features, and reference.

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A key question is, what features do generic pronouns have? And insofar as we can determine this, what does this tell us about ϕ -features and the nature of pronouns more generally? We will start by a survey of generic pronominal expressions in a set of languages representing different ‘pro-drop types’. In this paper we will focus mainly on Thai, a representative of the radical pro-drop type, with subject and object pro-drop without involvement of agreement.

We will show that the syntactic basis for the interpretation of the generic pronouns, though similar in the case of the exclusive and quasi-inclusive pronouns, is quite different in the case of the inclusive pronoun.

2. Generic pronouns in different types of pro-drop languages

In Thai, a radical pro-drop language, the generic pronouns are realised as follows:

- (2) a. *díawníi ɲaan hǎa yâak mâak thâa Ø mây còb trii.* [Thai]
 nowadays job seek difficult very if NEG finish BA
 ‘Nowadays to seek a job is difficult if one hasn’t finished a BA.’
- b. *raw kin cee nay duan tùlaakhom.*
 we have vegetarian food in month October
 ‘We have vegetarian food in October.’
- c. *bon kò ní sùanyài (khǎw) plùuk chaa khǎay.*
 on island DEM mostly they grow tea sell
 ‘On this island they grow and sell tea.’

The inclusive pronoun in (2a) is null, and can only be null; there is no overt inclusive pronoun in Thai. The quasi-inclusive pronoun *raw* in (2b) is overt, and has to be, if the sentence is uttered out of the blue. The pronoun in (2c), on the other hand, can be null or overt, and still be interpreted as generic, even if the sentence is uttered out of the blue,

Consider Italian, an example of a consistent pro-drop language, in the terminology of Holmberg (2005) and Biberauer et al. (2010).

- (3) a. *Si lavora sempre troppo.* [Italian]
 SI work.3SG always too-much
 ‘One always works too hard.’
- b. *Secondo il primo ministro, (noi) dobbiamo essere p ú produttivi.*
 According the prime minister we should.1PL be more productive
 ‘According to the PM, we need to be more productive.’
- c. *Ø parlano molte lingue in India.*
 speak.3PL many languages in India
 ‘They speak many languages in India.’

As discussed in Holmberg (2005) and Biberauer et al. (2010) the inclusive generic pronoun cannot be null in Italian and other consistent pro-drop languages. More precisely, it cannot be realised as a null, 3SG pronoun, a null ‘one’, in an ordinary active sentence. Sentence (6) can only be interpreted as shown, as having a referential 3SG subject.

- (4) Lavora sempre troppo. [Italian]
 work.3SG always too-much
 ‘He/she always works too hard.’

In Italian and most other Romance languages, the inclusive generic sentence employs the reflexive clitic pronoun *si/se*. The structure of sentences employing this pronoun is controversial; see Cinque (1988), Dobrovie-Sorin (1998), D’Alessandro (2007). The pronoun may be a realisation of the generic subject. Alternatively, it is a voice marker licensing a null, impersonal pronoun. In either case, it holds that ‘something special’ is required because the inclusive generic pronoun cannot be realised as a null 3SG pronoun in an ordinary active, finite sentence. The Slavic consistent pro-drop languages also make use of a reflexive pronoun in inclusive generic sentences (Krzek 2013a,b). Other consistent pro-drop languages resort to an overt indefinite pronoun, or passive voice, or they fall back on the 2^{SG} inclusive generic; see Holmberg (2010b).

The quasi-inclusive pronoun, on the other hand, is often null, but can be overt,² while the exclusive subject pronoun has to be null; see (3b,c).

Now consider Finnish, a partial pro-drop language, in the terminology of Holmberg (2005) and Biberauer et al. (2010).

- (5) a. T ä s s ä istuu Ø mukavasti. [Finnish]
 here sits comfortably
 ‘One can sit comfortably here.’
- b. (Me) sy ö m m e Suome s s a paljon savukalaa.
 we eat.1PL Finland.INE much smoked.fish
 ‘We eat a lot of smoked fish in Finland’
- c. Intiassa puhutaan Ø monta eri kielt ä
 India.INE speak.IMPL many different language
 ‘They speak many different languages in India.’

Characteristic of partial pro-drop languages is that they allow pro-drop but under more restricted circumstances than consistent or radical pro-drop languages. In Finnish, subject pro-drop is generally optional with 1st and 2nd person pronouns, but with 3rd person referential pronouns it is only possible in embedded position under control by a subject in a higher clause; see Holmberg, Nayudu & Sheehan (2009), Holmberg (2010a), Holmberg & Sheehan (2010). As shown in (5a), the inclusive generic pronoun is null, though, and has to be (the position of the null pronoun is because the finite verb undergoes raising to T). As shown in (5b), the quasi-inclusive pronoun can be optionally null. The exclusive generic construction is generally expressed in Finnish with an impersonal verb form, also identified as a passive (Blevins 2003, Manninen and Nelson 2004). It is controversial whether there is a null subject in the construction at all.³

The upshot is that the quasi-inclusive generic pronoun behaves in a similar manner in the three languages. We will see below that it can be null in Thai, too, given the right context.

² The following example was found on the internet. Thanks to Mara Frascarelli for discussing this point with us.

(i) praticamente secondo loro **noi** dovremmo credere a Bersani, Berlusconi, o Monti ma..."
 in other words, in their opinion we should believe Bersani, Berlusconi or Monti but..."

³ An interesting complication in Finnish is that the 1PL, referential as well as generic, is colloquially expressed by the same impersonal form as in (5c). In that case, the pronoun has to be overt. We will ignore this complication here.

Even putting the Finnish case aside, there is variation regarding the exclusive generic pronoun, though: optionally null in Thai, but obligatorily null in Italian. And especially with regard to the inclusive pronoun there is some striking variation: null in Thai and Finnish, but not in Italian. As we shall see below, there is also an interesting difference between the null generic pronoun in Thai and that in Finnish. Thus it is different in the three languages, the differences correlating with the type of pro-drop, as we will demonstrate.

These properties of the generic pronouns, we will argue, are not accidental, language-particular facts, but follow, for the most part, from a theory of pronominal reference and pronominal features.

3. The inclusive generic pronoun

We will begin by recounting the explanation in Holmberg (2005, 2010) for why Italian and other consistent pro-drop languages do not have a 3SG generic pronoun, while Finnish and the other partial pro-drop languages do. The difference is to do with the ϕ -features of T, i.e. with agreement: the consistent pro-drop languages include a definiteness feature as part of the ϕ -feature set of T, the partial pro-drop languages don't. In this respect, the consistent pro-drop languages have richer agreement than the partial pro-drop ones. The effect when T has a definiteness feature is that when a definite 3SG pronoun enters an agreement relation with T, all its features are copied by T, and as a result, the pronoun is deleted/ not spelled out, being a copy of the features of T. An indefinite or generic 3^{SG} pronoun cannot be null; it will not be a copy of the features of T. In Italian, as mentioned, the inclusive generic pronoun is spelled out as *si*. In the partial pro-drop languages, T does not include a definite feature. This means that the features of a definite 3rd person subject pronoun will not all be represented in T. Consequently the definite 3rd person pronoun cannot be deleted (except if it is controlled by a nominal argument in a higher clause; see Holmberg, Nayudu and Sheehan 2009, Holmberg and Sheehan 2010). The inclusive generic pronoun, according to Holmberg (2005, 2010), has 3SG features but no D-layer. When it enters an agreement relation with T, all its features will be represented by the D-less T, and consequently the pronoun will be deleted, being a copy of the features of T.

What features do generic pronouns have? What is it that makes them generic, not referential? As for the quasi-inclusive generic pronoun 'we' and the exclusive 'they', it seems straightforward enough that they have 1PL and 3PL features, respectively. Their null counterparts in Italian also have these features, judging from the agreement on the finite verb. We repeat the relevant examples with null subjects.

- (6) a. Secondo il primo ministro, dobbiamo essere più produttivi. [Italian]
 according the prime minister should.1PL be more productive
 'According to the PM, we need to be more productive.'
- b. Parlano molte lingue in India.
 speak.3PL many languages in India
 'They speak many languages in India.'

Still, the fact that they have generic reference rather than specific suggests that there is some featural difference between them and specific 1PL and 3PL pronouns. We will put the quasi-inclusive and exclusive pronouns aside for the time being, and instead focus on the inclusive generic pronoun. In English, generic *one* is 3SG. In Finnish, too, the agreement on the verb signals that the generic subject pronoun is 3SG.

(7) a. One always works too hard.

b. T ä n n e t u l e e m i e l l ä ä n . [Finnish]
 here come.PRS.3SG with.pleasure
 ‘It’s nice to come here.’

While this is uncontroversial in the case of English, it is not as straightforward in Finnish. There is a possibility that the 3SG marking on the verb is not due to agreement but is a default marking, in the absence of anything to agree with. But as discussed in Holmberg (2005, 2010b), there are some clear indications that the 3SG on the verb is due to agreement with the null subject. We will not repeat that discussion here. Also in other languages with an overt inclusive generic pronoun, it is typically 3SG. There are also languages where it is 3PL, among them Hebrew and, with some qualification, Russian, two partial pro-drop languages (Barbosa, to appear).⁴

There are also many languages where the inclusive generic meaning can be expressed by a 2SG pronoun, overt or null, with 2SG agreement, if the language has agreement. We put this generic pronoun aside in this paper, though (see Gruber 2013).

What about Thai? Thai is a radical pro-drop language with no agreement and no pronounced inclusive generic pronoun.

(8) d i a w n i i n a a n h ä ä y ä a k m ä a k t h ä a Ø m ä y c ò b t r i i [Thai]
 nowadays job seek difficult very if NEG finish BA
 ‘It’s difficult to seek a job nowadays if one hasn’t finished a BA.’

Consider the semantics of the inclusive generic pronoun. As mentioned, the meaning is ‘people in general including me and you’. Since the speaker and the addressee are included in the reference of the pronoun, there is actually no semantic motivation for the 3rd person feature that the generic pronoun has in English, Finnish and many other languages. The reference includes everybody, speaker, addressee and everybody else: it is unrestricted. We take this to mean that the inclusive generic pronoun has no ϕ -features. This follows given that what ϕ -features do is restrict the reference of a pronoun (or nominal expression more generally), to only the speaker (1SG), or the speaker and his/her associates (1PL), or the addressee (2SG), or a female person who is not the speaker or the addressee (3SG.F), etc.

This suggests that the 3SG feature is prevalent as marking of the inclusive generic pronoun in some languages because it is the minimal ϕ -feature specification. In some theories of pronominal features 3SG is a minus-valued entity: [–PLURAL, –PARTICIPANT] (where PARTICIPANT corresponds to 1st and 2nd person). A version of this theory holds that 3SG is absence of number and person; see Harley and Ritter (2002), Nevins (2007) for discussion. The plural of the 3PL feature in Hebrew can be explained by the semantic plurality of the reference: people in general including me and you. But given the inclusion of speaker and addressee, the 3rd person feature still has no semantic motivation.

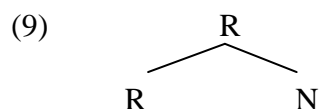
Furthermore, we propose that in Finnish, Brazilian Portuguese, and other languages with a null generic subject pronoun and agreement, i.e. the partial pro-drop languages, the generic pronoun has to have some person and number feature value because the agreement features of T have to be assigned a value. The favoured feature values are 3SG because these

⁴ Thanks to Peter Arkadiev for discussion of the Russian case with us. It seems that the 3PL form is not used in the pure inclusive sense in Russian. Instead, they tend to rely on the 2^{SG} pronoun.

are the minimal feature values.⁵ That is to say, the features are due to a morphological requirement.

In languages that have no agreement, morphology there is no such requirement. This means that the generic pronoun in, for example, Thai has no ϕ -features. A version of this idea is articulated in Phimsawat (2011). A corollary is that the pronoun must be null: Because it has no ϕ -features, there is nothing to spell out. The pronoun has minimal specification, hence minimal form (null), hence maximally inclusive reference.

Phimsawat (2011) proposes that the structure of the generic pronoun is (9):



Here, R is a referential feature, a property of all arguments (an alternative label would be D, in more or less the sense of Longobardi (1994)). In the case of referential arguments, the value of R is a referential index, regarded as a syntactic feature. R can be assigned a value freely, or by virtue of anaphoric binding, or by operator-binding. In generic arguments, R is bound by a generic operator in C, an adverbial operator GENERALLY_x .

It is not quite true, though, that the inclusive generic pronouns discussed so far, even the ones in Thai, have no restricting features: In all the examples given their reference is restricted to humans. Is this a defining characteristic of the generic inclusive pronoun? Since the reference of the pronoun always, by definition, includes the speaker, it has to include humans in its reference. Is it the case, though, that it cannot also include non-humans?

We may note first of all that it can include other conscious beings than humans, such as technologically advanced aliens from outer space or fictional talking animals. The reference of *one* in (9) could include such beings. When we say ‘human’ in the following, we actually refer to conscious beings more generally.

To test whether generic inclusive pronouns can include reference to non-humans, we need to select a predicate which can be applied to humans and non-humans. All the examples so far have had predicates with a human bias: ‘be in love’, ‘finish a BA’, ‘eat vegetarian food in October’, etc. A predicate which can apply to humans, animals and plants is ‘grow’. We have tested a number of languages using this predicate. The question is whether a sentence such as the following can refer to humans only, or if it can refer to humans *and* plants.

- (10) *thâa* Ø *dâayrâb* *khwaamrâk* *khwaam?awcaysây* Ø *kôo* *cá* *too* *rew*. [Thai]
 if get love care then FUT grow fast
 ‘If ones (animals, plants included) get love and care, ones will grow up faster.’

The translation into English clearly can only refer to humans. The generic pronoun *one* can only include humans in its reference. But the Thai sentence can refer to humans and plants.

It turns out that there is some interesting cross-linguistic variation. According to the data we have at this point, the following languages are like Thai in that the null inclusive generic pronoun can include plants along with humans and animals in its reference: Chinese (Mandarin and Taiwanese), Korean, Japanese, Sinhala, Vietnamese.⁶ We give an example

⁵ As mentioned, 2^{SG} is another option in many languages, which we ignore in this paper. Incidentally, Thai is a language where the 2^{SG} pronoun cannot be generic (see Gruber 2013) for a survey of the 2SG generic pronoun across languages).

⁶ Thanks especially to Seiki Ayano, Shin-Sook Kim, and Ji Young Shim for discussion of the Japanese and Korean facts, which made it clear to us what the general pattern is, among the radical pro-drop languages.

from Mandarin Chinese and one from Korean. Both mean ‘If one gets a lot of nutrition, one will grow fast’, but crucially, they can include humans as well as animals and plants in their reference.⁷

- (11) a. Rúguǒ n éng huò dé gèng duō de yíngyǎng, n ài me hu ì zhǎng de g èng ku ài.
 if can get of more of nutrition, (that) (will) grow of more fast
 [Mandarin Chinese]
- b. yeongyangpwun-ul seopchwiha-myeon, ppali calaŋ-ta [Korean]
 nutrition -ACC take -if quickly grow.PRES DECL

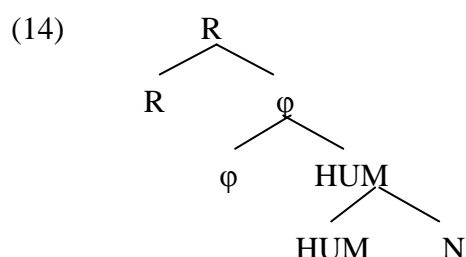
But in the following languages the null generic 3rd person pronoun can only include humans: Brazilian Portuguese, Finnish, Hebrew, Icelandic, Polish, Tamil.

- (12) im meqablim harbe ahava ve maym az gdelim maher.⁸ [Hebrew]
 if receive.3PL much love and water then grow.3PL faster
 ‘If one gets much love and water, one will grow faster.’
- (13) Sit ä kasvaa nopeammin jos saa paljon ravintoa. [Finnish]
 EXPL grow.3SG faster if get.3SG much nutrition
 ‘One grows faster if one gets plenty of nutrition’

We can therefore maintain that the structure and composition of the null generic pronoun in Thai is as in (9) above. And we propose, as a tentative hypothesis, that this is also the case in the other languages where the pronoun is not restricted to humans.

The data we have at this point suggest that a crucial difference between the languages where the inclusive pronoun is all-inclusive and the ones where it is restricted to humans is subject-verb agreement: The former set of languages lack subject-verb agreement, while the latter set of languages all have it. We have no clear idea, at this point, how to explain this correlation, so we put it aside, for future research.

However, we propose that the featural make-up of the null generic pronoun in the languages where it can only refer to humans is (14).⁹



⁷ Sigurðsson and Egerland (2009: note 13) mention that the null arbitrary (not generic) impersonal subject can refer to animals provided that the predicate is animal-specific. They provide the following example:

(i) Þá var hneggjað á hesthúsinu. [Icelandic]
 then was neighed in the.stable
 ‘Some X then neighed in the stable.’

⁸ Thanks to Ur Shlonsky for the example.

⁹ The relation between the human feature and the (other) ϕ -features is an interesting issue. We assume it is lower than the other ϕ -features, since it restricts the values that the other features can have, particularly gender and person. For example, 1st person requires [HUM].

So we conclude: The null generic pronoun in Thai is featureless, apart from a nominal feature and the feature R, which is unvalued when the pronoun is merged as subject of the sentence, but which is assigned generic reference when bound by a generic operator in C. (15) is the structure of the second clause of (4).¹⁰

Also, because it has no ϕ -features, it is null: there are no ϕ -features to spell-out. The categorial feature N has no spelled out form, nor does the R-feature when assigned generic value.

(17) lûuksǎaw₁ (khóŋ) ceen₂ kèn khamnuan | khruu₃ bòok wǎa (*khǎw₁)
 daughter of-GEN Jane good at calculation teacher say COMP she
 sòb lêek dâi khánɛn súŋsùd.
 exam maths get mark highest
 ‘Jane’s daughter is good at calculations. The teacher said that she got top marks for
 maths.’

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In the absence of context, and when the inclusive generic interpretation is not an option, a null argument will be interpreted as deictic, referring to the dominant discourse participant, i.e. the speaker. In other words, without a linguistic antecedent, the speaker is the default antecedent. In other cases, when the speaker is impossible for pragmatic or grammatical reasons, the addressee is readily available as the antecedent, as in (18):

- (18) Ø tɔŋ chɯaj ɕhǎn ná.
must help me PRT
'You must help me.'

Alternatively, both speaker and addressee may be available as the antecedent of the null argument, depending on the context. (19) illustrates a case where the context does allow this interpretation:

- (19) Ø maa tham ʔaahǎn kin kan mǎy.
let cook food eat together Q PRT
'Shall we cook and eat together?'

The generalisation is, an argument can be null if it has a local enough antecedent or it refers uniquely to the speaker and/or the addressee, or, as we saw in the previous section, if it has no ϕ -features (the case of the inclusive generic pronoun).¹¹ We can be a bit more specific. Following Frascarelli (2007), we assume that a null argument A is licensed, i.e. assigned a referential index, by a null Topic in the C-domain of the minimal finite sentence containing A (see Holmberg 2010a). The null Topic itself is licensed via a Topic chain linking it to a spelled out Topic argument in the discourse context. This is the definition of 'a local enough antecedent'. In the absence of a licensed null Topic in the C-domain, the Speaker feature, always present in the highest layer of the C-domain of a finite sentence, can step in as antecedent of A, or, if this does not yield a sensible interpretation, the Addressee feature, likewise always present in the C-domain of a finite sentence, can step in and assign a referential index to A. This is adopting Sigurðsson's (2004, 2015) theory of 'speech features' in the C-domain, as syntactic representations of the speaker and the addressee (without, however, accepting the theory wholesale).

5. The quasi-inclusive generic pronoun

Consider now the quasi-inclusive pronoun.

- (20) **Raw** kin cee nay ɕuan tùlaakhɔm.
we have vegetarian food in month October
'We have vegetarian food in October.'

¹¹ According to Phimsawat (2011), all null arguments in Thai are ϕ -featureless, consisting of just [R, N]. Null referential arguments would have their R valued by copying the referential index of an accessible antecedent argument. A problem for this theory is the possibility of sloppy identity. In Thai even subjects allow sloppy identity, as in (i).

(i) cɔɔn bòk wâa lûuksǎaw khǒɔŋ khǎw kɛŋ khànitásàat lé ceen bòk wâa ____ kɛŋ phaasǎa ʔaŋkrít
John say that daughter of him good maths and Jane say that good language English
'John said that his daughter is good at maths, and Jane said that *John's daughter/ Jane's daughter/ Jane* is good at English.'

The sloppy identity reading ('Jane's daughter') cannot be the result of copying a referential index as there is no such referential index in the sentence. Sloppy identity is compatible with an NP deletion analysis of pro-drop (Tomioka 2003). We leave this issue open in this paper.

The pronoun here can have referential interpretation, referring to the speaker and some person or group associated with him/her, which may or may not include the addressee. In the right context, typically if the preceding sentence has a Topic which refers to ‘us’ (the speaker and his/her associates), the pronoun can then be null, licensed by a null Topic in the C-domain, which itself is linked to the Topic in the preceding sentence. But it can also have a generic reading, as when uttered by a Thai person to a foreigner (who understands Thai), meaning ‘Thai people in general have vegetarian food in October’. It is quasi-inclusive, not all-inclusive, as it does not (necessarily) include the addressee. Its reference is therefore restricted; it has ϕ -features: [+1,−2], if we define person in terms of two binary features [± 1 , ± 2], a PL feature, and in Thai also an honorific status feature.¹² Assuming that it has the structure [R [ϕ N]], the R-feature can be assigned generic value by the GEN operator, as we postulated in the case of the inclusive generic pronoun. However, we will return to this issue below, in section 7.

A criterial difference between the specific and the generic reading is that the generic reading allows exceptions (see Moltmann 2006). Under the specific reading, say, if *raw* in (20) refers to a female speaker and her husband, it would be false if one of them would actually not eat vegetarian food in October. But under the generic reading, (20) would be true even if some Thai people don’t eat vegetarian food in October (in fact it could be true even if most Thai people, including the speaker, don’t eat vegetarian food in October).

The quasi-inclusive pronoun can be null in the right context. If there are two occurrences of the quasi-inclusive generic pronoun in the same sentence uttered out of the blue, one in the matrix sentence, one in an embedded sentence, then the generic pronoun in the matrix subject position must be overt, the one in the embedded sentence must be null.

- (21) *(*raw*) kin cee nay đuan tùlaakhom lăŋ Ø thamboonsàjbàat.
 we have veg.food in month October after offer food to monk
 ‘We have vegetarian food in October after offering food to monks.’

This is a case of an extended notion of control; see Phimsawat (2011). It falls under the principle that a null argument needs a local enough antecedent, although the mechanism is arguably not the same as in the case of licensing across independent sentences in discourse.

Furthermore, if the quasi-inclusive pronoun has an antecedent in a preceding sentence, it can be null.

- (22) raw mii pràpeniipàtibàt mākmaay thīi muanthay | (*raw*) kin cee
 we have tradition lots in Thailand we have vegetarian food
 nay đuan tùlaakhom lăŋ Ø thamboonsàjbàat.
 in month October after offer food to monks
 ‘We have lots of traditions in Thailand. We have vegetarian food in October after offering food to monks.’

That is to say, the quasi-inclusive generic pronoun behaves much the same as its referential counterpart: It can be (sometimes must be) null when controlled. A special case of this is when it is controlled by a null topic.

At this point we will turn to the exclusive generic pronoun, and then come back to the quasi-inclusive one.

¹² Pronouns in Thai are not generally marked for number, but they are marked for honorific status; see Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom (2005: 49-57).

6. The exclusive generic pronoun

The generic exclusive reading excludes the speaker and the addressee. As mentioned, a characteristic property of the exclusive generic sentence in Thai is that the subject is optionally null, while in Italian, it is obligatorily null.

- (23) a. Thîi mûubâan nîi ((phûak-)khǎw) mâi kin nûa kanleey.¹³
At village DEM they NEG eat meat at all
'In this village they don't eat meat at all.'

- b. (*Loro) parlano molte lingue in India.
they speak many languages in India

Another characteristic property of the exclusive generic pronoun is that it needs a locative adverbial. Remove the locative adverbial from (23a,b), and the subject can only be interpreted as referential. Furthermore, if uttered out of the blue, the pronoun must then be overt in Thai, and can be overt in Italian (if it is a shifted Topic or is contrastive).

- (24) a. Phûak-khǎw mâi kin nûa kanleey.
They NEG eat meat at all
'They don't eat meat at all.'

- b. (Loro) parlano molte lingue.
They speak many languages

This is not something unique to pro-drop languages. Basically the same situation holds in English, and probably many other languages, as discussed in Cabredo Hofherr (2003) and especially Brody (2013). Brody notes that, for example, (25a) cannot have the exclusive generic (or as he calls it 'impersonal/universal') reading, while (25b) can.

- (25) a. They like to take a nap in the afternoon.
b. In Italy, they like to take a nap in the afternoon.

The adverbial can also be a temporal adverbial of the sort which denotes a temporal stage, such as 'in the Middle Ages'.

- (26) In the Middle Ages they generally died young.

Compare also (27):

- (27) (In Italy) people like to take a nap in the afternoon.

The noun *people* can have a generic reading with or without a locative adverbial. Comparison of (25a,b) and (27) offers a possible clue to why the 3PL pronoun in (23), (25b), and (27) can be interpreted as generic: the locative (or temporal) adverbial licenses a silent argument 'people'; see Brody (2013). In the following, we will exploit this idea both for the exclusive and the quasi-inclusive case.

¹³ *Khǎw* is an abbreviated version of *phûak-khǎw* commonly used in spoken Thai. *phûak-* encodes plurality. A context is essential to determine whether *khǎw* is 3SG or 3PL.

We may note first that this will explain why the pronoun is optionally null in (23a). There is, or can be, a covert noun ‘people’ in the construction which binds the pronoun, which is then null (unless it is emphasized/contrastive). In the absence of the covert noun, the pronoun will be overt. We will assume that ‘silent people’ (Brody’s term) is a null Topic, preceded by a scene-setting locative or temporal PP (of the right kind).

- (28) [CP [thîi mùubâan níi] [TopP khon_i Top [TP Ø_i mây kin núa kanleey]]]
 at village DEM people they NEG eat meat at.all

(23a) would then be derived by a rule of ‘people deletion’: the Topic is not phonologically spelled out. Normally, as discussed in section 2, following Frascarelli (2007), referential null arguments are bound/controlled by a null Topic, which itself is interpreted by being linked to a discourse Topic. In the case of (23a/28), the null Topic ‘people’ is licensed by the locative PP, by a grammatical mechanism which we do not entirely understand.¹⁴

Brody (2013) remains entirely vague as regards the formal implementation of the idea that exclusive generic expressions involve ‘silent people’. He concludes that ‘silent people’ is “present only semantically”, with no further attempt to formalise it; a disappointingly vague hypothesis. He rejects the idea ‘silent people’ would head a DP modified by the locative PP, so that, for example, (25b) would be derived from (29) by deletion of *people*.

- (29) [DP people in Italy], they like to take nap in the afternoon

An argument against this analysis is that the putative rule of *people* deletion cannot apply to such DPs when they are in subject or object position. We cannot, for example, derive (30b) from (30a).

- (30) a. People in Italy like to take a nap in the afternoon.
 b. *In Italy like to take a nap in the afternoon.

But this argument does not affect our analysis (28), where ‘people’ is a null Topic licensed by a scene-setting adverbial. An argument against this analysis, though, as the only possible configuration licensing ‘silent *people*’ is that the locative (or temporal) expression need not be in sentence-initial position the way it is in (23a) or (25b). In the Italian example (23b), for example, the locative PP is quite clearly an adjunct to VP.

Consider (31), though, the Thai counterpart of (23b).

- (31) khăw phûut kan lăay phaasăa thî ?india. [Thai]
 they speak together many language at India
 ‘They speak many languages in India.’

Here the pronoun, which can be generic, has to be overt. This indicates that the analysis in (28) might be right after all: In (31), because the locative PP is not in the C-domain, a null Topic ‘people’ is not licensed, and for this reason, the pronoun has to be overt. So how is the generic reading then effected in (31)? Another interesting property of (31) is that the adverb *kan* ‘together’ is required for the generic reading. Without it, the pronoun will

¹⁴ Gruber (2013) articulates a theory of indexical pronouns, including the 2SG generic pronoun, where they all require spatial anchoring, by an overt or covert spatial expression. This theory could conceivably be extended to the exclusive generic case, even though it is not indexical (i.e. 1st or 2nd person).

be interpreted as referential. We do not profess to understand how this mechanism works, so we leave it for future research.

Brody (2013) concludes, from his discussion of exclusive generic *they* in English that this is not a different, generic *they*, but the ordinary referential pronoun *they*, which gets its generic reading because it is bound by the silent generic expression *people*. We are happy to extend this conclusion to Thai as well, and probably much more generally.

Consider Italian; we repeat the example (23b) as (32):

- (32) Parlano molte lingue in India.
 speak.3PL many languages in India
 ‘They speak many languages in India.’

Recall that Italian, by hypothesis, has a definite feature in T with the effect that null 3SG pronouns can only be interpreted as definite/referential. This explained why Italian needs an overt inclusive generic pronoun *si*. Then how come (32) can have a null 3PL pronoun interpreted as (exclusive) generic? We suggest this is because the null 3PL subject in (32) is not a null version of the definite pronoun *loro* ‘they’, but ‘silent people’, with deletion licensed by the locative adverbial. Again, we will leave the formal details of this analysis for future research.

7. The quasi-inclusive pronoun revisited

If the generic interpretation of the exclusive generic pronoun is due to a silent noun ‘people’, we might wonder whether this silent noun is also part of the syntax of the other generic pronouns.

We can safely discard the idea that it would be involved in the case of the inclusive generic pronoun. To begin with, as we demonstrated above in section 3, in Thai and a number of other radical pro-drop languages the reference of the inclusive generic pronoun can include not just people but also, for example, plants. Second, in most of the partial pro-drop languages, where the null inclusive pronoun does refer exclusively to people, the agreement on the verb is singular, not plural as we would expect if the subject is ‘people’. The only clear exception that we are aware of is Hebrew. In this language we may indeed consider the possibility that there is a silent noun ‘people’ involved.

For the quasi-inclusive generic pronoun, though, we may consider the possibility that it is involved. More specifically, we may consider the possibility that the quasi-inclusive generic pronoun is an adnominal construction ‘we people’, with ‘people’ deleted, under essentially the same condition as in the case of the exclusive generic pronoun. It is certainly typical of the quasi-inclusive generic construction, too, to have a locative restrictor (or temporal, of the right kind). For example, corresponding to (33a), there would be (33b), where the PF of (33b) is derived by deletion of the noun ‘people’.

- (33) a. raw khon thai mii pràpeeniipàtibàt mâakmaay.
 we Thai have tradition lots
 b. [raw ~~khon~~] mii pràpeeniipàtibàt mâakmaay thîi muanthay.¹⁵
 we people have tradition lots in Thailand
 ‘We have lots of traditions in Thailand.’

¹⁵ To construct a well-formed sentence, the deletion of *khon* ‘people’ is obligatory.

The deletion of *khon* ‘people’ would be licensed by the locative adverbial, as in the other cases discussed above (leaving the details for future research).

This analysis would be particularly natural in a theory of pronoun structure where definite pronouns always have the structure [D NP], where D is spelled out as the pronominal form and the NP component is normally null, but can be spelled out as in *we linguists*, *you students*, etc.; Panagiotidis (2002), Elbourne (2008). The quasi-inclusive generic pronoun would be *we people*, but with the NP component deleted/not spelled out. This analysis cannot easily be extended to the exclusive pronoun because *they people*, *they students*, etc. is an ungrammatical construction in most, though not all, languages (Georg Höhn, p.c.). Furthermore, the variation between (28) and (31) would not easily be captured under such an analysis.

The analysis of the exclusive and quasi-inclusive generic pronouns as derived by ‘people deletion’ raises the issue what role, if any, is played by the generic operator GEN, which we postulated, following much work particularly on the semantics of generic expressions (Carlson and Pelletier 1995, Moltmann 2006). In the case where the postulated, deleted noun ‘people’ is a component of a DP argument, we may assume that it is bound by a generic operator in CP. But this would presumably not be the case where ‘people’ is itself a null topic, binding a null argument in TP. In that case, it would seem that the generic reading is an effect of the null Topic itself. We leave this issue as well for future research.

8. Conclusions

Our conclusions as regards the features of the three generic pronouns are:

- (1) The inclusive generic pronoun in Thai (and in radical pro-drop languages more generally) has no ϕ -features. It is made up of nothing but an abstract noun and an R (or D) head assigned generic value by the generic operator GEN in the C-domain. This accounts for its interpretation (maximally general) and its form (null).
- (2) The quasi-inclusive generic pronoun is derived from an adnominal construction ‘we people’ by deletion of ‘people’.
- (3) The exclusive generic pronoun is also derived by ‘people deletion’. One construction where this is commonly found is where ‘people’ is a null Topic in the C-domain binding a pronoun in TP. In Thai, the pronoun is null in this case.

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